

Principles of Linguistic Change

VOLUME 3: COGNITIVE AND
CULTURAL FACTORS

William Labov

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VOLUME 3: COGNITIVE AND
CULTURAL FACTORS

William Labov

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Foreword

This third volume of *Principles of Linguistic Change*, dealing with *Cognitive and Cultural Factors*, appears a decade after the second, and some accounting for the delay might be in order. The first volume, on *Internal Factors*, in 1994 was followed by the second one, on *Social Factors*, in 2001. The next five years were largely occupied with the publication of the *Atlas of North American English* (ANAE). The *Atlas* radically transformed our view of linguistic change in progress in North America, and much of the present volume is devoted to understanding the impact of its findings. ANAE built upon the solid and reliable work of Kurath and McDavid in the Eastern United States, and many chapters of this volume will show how strongly their fundamental insights are confirmed. But that traditional base was not embedded in a systematic analysis of linguistic structure. It did not employ the approach to structural change generated by Martinet, Weinreich and Moulton, nor the principles of accountability used in the study of change and variation. Prior to the Telsur study that is the basis of ANAE, those tools had been applied in the study of a relatively small number of speech communities: Martha's Vineyard, New York City, Detroit, Panama City, Norwich, Montreal, Philadelphia, and in exploratory studies of a few dozen cities in England and America as reported in Labov, Yaeger and Steiner in 1972. The selection of those cities was the result of a series of historical accidents stemming from the personal history of the researchers. The larger linguistic landscape of North America, outside of the Eastern United States, was left in darkness until ANAE appeared.

Three major findings were surprising both to linguists and to the general public. (1) It was found that dialect diversity is not diminishing: the larger regional dialects, each defined by active changes in progress, are becoming increasingly more different from each other. (2) Several of these regions, especially the Inland North, display an extraordinary homogeneity across great distances and across large populations. (3) The boundaries separating many of these communities are sharply defined by the coincidence of many phonological and lexical isoglosses. In the four years since the publication of the *Atlas*, I have pursued many paths towards the explanation of these phenomena. Various chapters of this volume are engaged with the effort

to account for them by settlement histories, cultural patterns and general principles of linguistic change. I am more than ever indebted to my co-authors of the ANAE, Sherry Ash and Charles Boberg, for their help in constructing the solid foundation on which the current volume is built.

The second to fourth chapters set the stage for the investigation by demonstrating that the cognitive consequences of linguistic change are a serious reduction in intelligibility within and across dialects. Here too I am indebted to Sherry Ash, my partner in the experimental studies of cross-dialectal comprehension, which date from the 1980s.

The seventeen chapters of this volume were given the most intensive scrutiny by two reviewers. I have spent the last five months in radical revisions in response to their comments, corrections and suggestions. Gregory Guy and Ronald Kim have allowed me to name them and to acknowledge my deep indebtedness to them for this effort. I have footnoted only a few of their contributions, which are found literally on every page.

In this volume I have built upon the recent research of Maciej Baranowski, Jeffrey Conn, Aaron Dinkin, Keelan Evanini, Joseph Fruehwald, Matt Gordon, Kirk Hazen, Daniel Johnson, Jamila Jones, Paul Kerswill, Dennis Preston, Gillian Sankoff, and Tonya Wolford. The work of Peter Trudgill on language change and diffusion is a point of reference throughout the volume. The insights of Penelope Eckert on the social meaning of variation are fundamental to this volume. Much of my effort is devoted to the challenge of applying her findings in the Detroit area to a wider context, and each exchange with her has led to an advance in my own thinking.

For all these contributions, many thanks. I hope I have made good use of them.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions in the above lists and in the text, and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

Preface

Those of us associated with Blackwell's Language in Society series over the thirty years of its existence have been delighted that we were able to publish so many titles which have been, and remain, highly significant and extremely influential in the development of linguistics. Many of them indeed have become classics in the field. But I am sure that few of the authors who have so far contributed to this series – and up till now we have published nearly forty different titles – would object to my saying that Labov's now completed work is very likely to prove to be the most important of all. When the first volume of his trilogy was published in 1994, I wrote that without William Labov there would have been no Language in Society series. And most of the scholars who have published books in this series will, I am sure, readily acknowledge their own scholarly debt to him and his work.

Now, sixteen years later, the appearance of the long-awaited final part of William Labov's massive trilogy can be seen in context for what it is: an event of immense importance for linguistics, and more especially, of course, for the study of linguistic change. We are now in a position to say that the three volumes of *The Principles of Linguistic Change* – devoted respectively to *Internal Factors*; *Social Factors*; and *Cognitive and Cultural Factors* – represent the product of an academic lifetime of outstanding accomplishment in our discipline which has few parallels: this really is a magnum opus. Labov's is a remarkable achievement; not only did he initiate a whole new field of research, he has also subsequently remained at the very forefront of innovative research in the field, over a period spanning five decades. In particular, his empirical linguistic research into language as it is really used by real speakers in real situations has produced exciting insights into the intricate mechanisms that lie behind language change. Bill has truly succeeded, to use his own phrase, in employing the present to explain the past. Linguistic change has always been one of the most intriguing and little understood features of human language. After Bill Labov's three-volume masterpiece, it still remains intriguing; but thanks to him it is now significantly better understood.

Peter Trudgill

Abbreviations

AAVE	African–American Vernacular English
ACS	animal communication systems
ANAE	<i>Atlas of North American English</i> (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006a)
CDC	Cross-Dialectal Comprehension
DARE	<i>Dictionary of American Regional English</i>
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
JASA	<i>Journal of the Acoustical Society of America</i>
LANE	<i>Linguistic Atlas of New England</i> (Kurath et al. 1931)
LCV	Project on Linguistic Change and Variation in Philadelphia, 1972–9
LSA	Linguistic Society of America
LVC	Study of Linguistic Variation and Change in Philadelphia
LYS	Labov, Yaeger and Steiner 1972
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NCS	Northern Cities Shift
OH68	Telephone survey of low back merger in 1968
ONZE	Project on Origins of New Zealand English
PEAS	Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States (Kurath and McDavid 1961)
RP	Received Pronunciation
RWT	Ringe, Warnow and Taylor 2002
TS	Telsur number for ANAE subjects
UMRP	Urban Minorities Reading Project

Criteria for the Northern Cities Shift and the North/Midland Boundary

O2	Short <i>o</i> fronted: $F2(o) > 1450$ Hz
AE1	Short <i>a</i> raised: $F1(\text{æ}) < 700$ Hz
EQ	Short <i>a</i> higher and fronter than short <i>e</i> : $F1(\text{æ}) < F1(e)$ and $F2(\text{æ}) > F2(e)$
ED	Short <i>e</i> backed and short <i>o</i> fronted: $F2(e) - F2(o) < 375$ Hz

- UD Short *u* backed and short *o* fronted:
F2(Λ) < F2(o)
- ON The word *on* is in the short *o* class in the North.

Vowel subsystems

- V short vowels
- Vh long and ingliding vowels
- Vhr long and ingliding vowels before /r/
- VN vowels before nasal consonants
- Vw back upgliding diphthongs
- Vy front upgliding diphthongs